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THE MESSAGES OF THE PRINCE

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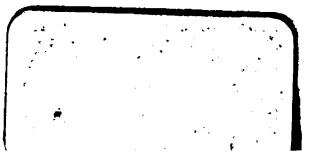

THE

MESSAGES OF THE PRINCE,

AND

HOW THEY WERE RECEIVED.

"But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandize."

Oxford & London:
J. H. AND JAS. PARKER.
1861.

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PREFACE.

THE writer of this little book commends it to the kind consideration of the public. If, by God's blessing, its simple pages should prove the means of arresting a fellow-sinner, and prevailing with him to escape from the snares of the enemy, and follow his Prince; or encourage any trembling one to go on with more confidence in His love; or induce any careless one to accept His message, and watch; the object and prayer of the author will be answered.

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The Messages of the Prince, and how they were received.

CHAPTER I.

THE COUNTRY.

I THOUGHT I was a stranger travelling in a strange country, where many and various scenes attracted my attention. The people seemed too much engrossed in their different occupations, either of pleasure or business, to heed me; so that I went amongst them almost unobserved.

Some were engaged in tilling the ground, labouring hard from sunrise to sunset. Some cultivated fair gardens, filled with rare and beautiful trees and flowers. Some worked at the loom, bending with pale and sickly faces over rich and delicate fabrics, which they wove with their thin fingers, forming a strange contrast to their own emaciated appearance, which the constant confinement soon produced. Some wrought in gold and silver. Some dug in deep mines, far underground, where the sweet breath of heaven never reached, nor the bright sunlight visited them; but they lived and died in these dark caverns. Some sought for gold, and appeared insatiable

in their thirst for it, often murdering one another in the effort to obtain it. Some dived to the depths of the sea, for precious pearls. In fact, no labour or trouble seemed too great to secure the treasures of the country. Some wrote by the midnight lamp to gain a precarious livelihood. I watched a haggard-looking man return to a cold and uninviting home after a day of toil; and still he sat over his weary task, and before him lay, on a hard, bare bed, his wife wasting with sickness, and his little ones badly clothed and hungry, who all depended on the labour of his hands; and far into the night he still toiled on.

I saw poor weary-looking women, working by dim lights, with children lying round them, not daring to take the necessary rest they needed; for if they relaxed their work, those little ones would miss even the meagre fare on which they subsisted; and their unfinished task must to-morrow be carried to some hard master, who paid the smallest wages for all their labour.

I saw others hurrying with care-worn and anxious looks to their different trades or business, where for hours they toiled, intent upon accumulating wealth; but I noticed that those that acquired the most were generally most eager in the pursuit of more. Some seemed to crave after it as for their daily food: they hoarded it; they counted its daily increase; their eyes fed upon it; as the heaps grew larger they gloated

over them; in some cases they could not bear to part with the least portion of it, even for the necessaries of life; and I supposed they were to keep it for ever, they loved it so much.

Some, as they acquired it, seemed to delight in spending it; they squandered it on all sides, accumulating around them useless things; adding field to field and house to house, as if they could never have enough, and only thought of selfish gratification, indifferent to the necessities of their children, and of their share in it, or of the wants of their poorer neighbours; they went from one house to another, till they seemed to grow weary of amusing themselves: and I gathered from their conduct that they also were to retain their possessions for ever.

I saw great emperors and kings in this strange country, and some of them fought on every side to extend their dominion, and made the whole land one battle-field to add to their empire or satisfy their ambition; and thousands of brave soldiers fell fighting in their cause, making many a heart and home desolate, to revenge a quarrel or aggrandize a name.

I saw others struggling to rise to place or station, pushing aside everything that obstructed them, even,—without remorse, (in many instances,) treading down their fellow men, if by any means they themselves might rise.

There were others deeply occupied in science;

their whole time was taken up in solving the mysteries of creation. They measured the distances of the stars, and gave them names. They dug deep into the earth, and thought by that means to ascertain its age, and how it was formed. They knew the heights of the mountains, and the depths of the ocean. They studied the birds, the beasts, the insects, and thought to unravel all the wonders of the universe.

Others spent their time in inventing wonderful machinery; they spread far and wide their iron roads, covered the ocean with their ships, propelling their vessels by sea, and their vehicles on land, with a velocity which rivalled the flight of birds for swiftness; and they had wires of communication, which, over the surface of the earth and underneath the seas, brought them messages with the speed of lightning.

I had seen so many sights of misery and wretchedness, that I felt weary of looking at them, and turned away, hoping to find something more cheerful.

And now I saw a house brilliantly lighted, and I entered there, expecting more pleasant scenes. Here was music and dancing, feasting, and merry-making; the old and the young were mingled together, all striving after amusement. I thought it strange to see aged persons in this assemblage vying with the youngest in gay attire, and when their cheeks had become pale and sunken, they

appeared to have painted them, in the vain hope that they would look young again. The effort of almost all seemed to be, how they might attract the most attention and gather round them the largest numbers; and I fancied I saw many a disappointed look from aged people when all their efforts were in vain, and they appeared unnoticed and unloved.

Late into the night they revelled; forgetting, in the pursuit of pleasure, all the quiet duties of their home.

Young mothers were amongst them, who left their children continually to the care of strangers; or, as they grew up, only taught them to follow in their footsteps, and to make the business of life consist in eating and drinking and adorning themselves, discovering new ways of attracting the greatest admiration, and drawing the largest circles around them, until fairer ones appeared, and claimed their share. Their pleasure-seeking seemed hard labour, for the fairest face soon grew pale under the daily excitement, and told the tale of their nightly revels, which seldom terminated till the morning sunrise broke in upon them.

I wondered much at their apparent indifference to the beautiful sights of nature, with which they were surrounded; such things seemed to have no charms for them; the sloping green fields, the bright blue sky, or towering mountains, the

waving trees, or lovely flowers, the songs of birds, or summer breezes, were all unmarked by them.

I turned to another place, where I again heard sounds of laughter. There, too, I saw mingled together old and young, amidst drunkenness and riot; these, too, called this pleasure, though of a rougher sort, and they also sat till daylight, the old often encouraging the younger to more folly, alike indifferent to the tears of wife or daughter, who came in vain to try to draw them from these dreadful dens; and when at length the morning light broke up their hideous orgies, woe to that unhappy household to which they staggered home.

I noticed also that many of these people carried about lamps; some quite extinguished, some just flickering; and some here and there I had seen burning brightly, but these were not amongst the last that I had watched. I wondered much at all I saw, and longed to have it explained to me; it seemed so strange, so like an unreal dream, that I was greatly troubled, and looked earnestly round to find some one of whom I might enquire.

CHAPTER II.

THE PRINCE.

Now as I thus wondered, and felt very sad, I saw one coming towards me. He appeared dif-

ferent from those I had been before watching. There was a calm and grave look on his face, unlike the others, and when he approached near enough to me, I ventured to address him. I told him I was a stranger passing through his country, and that I had been long watching the people, and should like to know something of their history.

He told me that long ago the whole country belonged to one great King, who was very good, and had made it all perfect in beauty, and everything was in peace and harmony; that there was no labour; the flowers and fruits grew without culture; the beasts of the field fed together in perfect tranquillity, and came at the call of man. But the King had an enemy, who entered in and wrought disturbance, disobedience, and death, and that now the beasts had become savage, and devoured man and one another; that the land no longer yielded its fruits or flowers without labour, but only by toil and cultivation; that in many parts the ground was undermined with subterranean fires, and the flames were ready at any moment to break forth and destroy it. "The enemy of whom I have told you," he continued, "is constantly watching to beguile any of my Lord's subjects whom he can persuade to follow him, and forsake their good Master, who, although absent, still reigns over them, and observes everything that passes continually.

Then I said, "But what does the enemy do, to

allure them in this way, and what wages does he offer them?"

"He first makes them blind and indifferent to everything but present pleasure, and the enjoyment of what they possess here; insinuates hard thoughts against their rightful King, and so fills their whole heart, as you have seen, with the vanities or occupations of the country, that they are unwilling or unable to look beyond it. But it would be impossible to describe all the means he takes to lead them to their destruction: and those who continue faithful to their King are the constant mark for his malignity, and he tries in every way to draw them from their allegiance. But you asked me what were his wages. That is the most wonderful thing of all; but he makes them continually forget it; for all he can do for them is, to carry them at last to his own place, which is one of unutterable torment."

"What!" said I, "do you mean that those whom I saw so engrossed in their riches and their possessions may be called upon to leave them, to give them up entirely, to carry none away with them, and that the end of all may be to them only torment?"

"So it is, indeed. Those who go over to the enemy's side, and forsake their good King, have nothing to look for beyond what I have told you. They act like madmen, forgetting that at any moment they may be obliged to leave it all, and go into the presence of their offended Lord."

"Oh," I said, "it is too dreadful! And may they, then, at any age be liable to leave these things in which they so delight?"

"Yes, indeed it is so," said he.

"But tell me, then, what has the good Lord done for these people to keep them from such an awful fate?"

"He has never ceased to send His messengers to teach and to beseech them; comforting them by reminding them of His love when they were afflicted, and promising His help and strength to enable them to keep His laws. But all His messengers they have hated, for the enemy continually stirred up the people against them, and so they cast them out when they came, beating some and killing some, and for the most part refusing to listen."

"Then did He leave them in their sin and folly?"

"Oh, no. When He found His messengers were not attended to, He accepted His Son's offer, and allowed Him to go—His only Son—to these rebellious children."

"Oh, how good; how good! Surely then they must have welcomed their own Prince with joy?"

"Alas, no. He came; He went in and out among them, even made Himself one of them; humbled Himself to the humblest; going about from house to house, amongst rich and poor, giving His Father's messages of love and goodness; telling them, if they would turn from their evil

ways, He would still forgive their rebellion, and accept them back again to His favour; and, at His intercession, receive them into His kingdom for ever."

"Did they not rejoice at this news?"

"No, indeed. Their hearts are very hard. He went about for more than three years doing good, healing the sick that came to Him, giving sight to the blind, opening the ears of the deaf, making the lame walk, and, (as His power was unlimited,) in some instances, bringing back the dead to life."

"Surely now they turned to Him, when they witnessed such marvels?"

"No," said my companion, "you will hardly credit it, and it is sad indeed to tell, but the more good He did, the more they appeared to hate Him. Often after teaching them all day He would retire to some mountain, where He remained all night, beseeching His Father to forgive these people who hated and persecuted Him. One night, when so doing, He saw His own followers (for He had a few which loved Him and remained with Him) tossed in their little boat upon the lake in a great storm; so He came down immediately and walked across the water to them, and when He came to the boat, He bade the winds cease, and the waves to be still, and there was a great calm."

"Oh, tell me more of this; it is, indeed, wonderful, and I should never be weary of hearing it."

"It is, indeed; but almost more wonderful is

the hardness of the people's hearts, for at last they determined to kill Him. They could not bear the light that shone from Him; it made their darkness more visible; so at length one of His own disciples betrayed the place where they would find Him, and led a band of soldiers, and a mob of people, into the quiet garden whither He had gone, with three of His disciples, to pray, having accepted thirty pieces of silver for the life of his good Master. He allowed them to lead Him before the judgment-seat, for the mockery of a trial, and there He stood without a word of reproach, for He knew that all the people had so offended His Father that He could not permit them to enter His kingdom unpunished, and He determined to die instead of them, and thus satisfy His Father's justice, and make it possible for Him to pardon them. They scoffed, and mocked, and buffeted Him. They asked Him if He was indeed the King's Son, and at last He acknowledged He was, and that when He should come again in great majesty to take His throne, and rule Himself, they should see Him."

"What did they say then?"

"This only enraged them more, and they put on Him in mockery a kingly robe, and a crown of thorns, and said, 'Hail, King!' And they delivered Him to the people, who cried out madly that He should be crucified, for that was considered the most shameful death. So they made

Him carry His own cross till, fainting under the weight of it, they gave it to another to carry, not in pity, but that He might be able to endure fresh torments; and then they nailed Him to it between two thieves."

"Did not He destroy them in His wrath?"

"No; He had determined to die for them: and before He died, when one of the thieves turned and asked His pardon, He promised to take him with Him to Paradise that day. And so He died."

"And what happened then?"

"The earth itself was ashamed. The sun hid its light, the rocks shook, and trembled to their foundations; but the heart of the people was harder than the rocks, and they went on still in their wicked ways."

"But were there none who loved and followed so good and gracious a Prince?"

"Yes, there were a few; there are still a few who love Him, and walk in His way, striving to follow Him, though they are hated by the others, as He was."

"But have you nothing more to tell me of this glorious and good Prince?"

"Much more than I could possibly tell you, but you can read all about it in His Book. But after three days He came back to His disciples, having risen from the dead, and told them He had vanquished and overcome the power of the enemy in his own domains, so that His people

might also overcome in His strength; and He taught them many things. And after promising them that the enemy should have no power over their souls, though he might distress their bodies, for that He should be ever watching them, so that no harm could come to them without His knowledge,—and that if they prayed to Him in any time of trouble or difficulty He would always hear them, and deliver them,—and that when they died, His bright ministering spirits (who always surround them, though unseen,) should carry their souls to His presence, where they should be for ever safe, beyond the possibility of evil,—He returned to His Father."

"Has He given them any further help?"

"Yes; besides His Book, in which they may read about His love, and goodness, and all His rules, He told them He would leave with them a Comforter, His Dove, who should continually remind them of all He would have them do, and strengthen them to do it. It is He who constantly supplies the light which you observe each carries. It is first given to them when they are little children, and their parents bring them up to the temples of the Prince, where His messengers perform upon them a holy rite, by the Prince's command, sprinkling them with water, to shew that they are cleansed from the defilement in which they were born, and are henceforth made children of their Prince, signed by

His sign, and named by His name. And He will enable them from that time to walk in His ways and follow Him; but they must now fight under His banner, as they are called by His name. And you may suppose, after this, it is worse for them if they go over to the enemy, for in that case they become, not only rebels fighting against their King, but children fighting against their Father. And yet His love is so unbounded, that, if they do forsake Him, He still follows them, beseeching them by His messengers to return, reminding them by the whispers of His Dove of all His love to them, of His care over them, and endeavouring to bring them back again to His fold."

"Does the Dove continue always to admonish them?"

"No: as they become more devoted to the enemy, they grow harder and harder, and more incapable of hearing His soft voice, till at length they are quite deaf to Him, and then He leaves them, as I told you, without light, their lamps extinguished."

"Oh, how dreadful to come to such a state! But is there anything more that is done for them?"

"Yes; besides all I have told you, His messengers continually assemble those that will come, into His temples, and there they read to them out of His Book, explaining it to them, teaching them, speaking words of comfort to the afflicted,

warning to the careless; telling them over and over again of the love of their King and Prince to them; offering up all their petitions, pronouncing in the name of their Prince pardon and forgiveness to the returning penitent, (for they are so prone to evil that they are continually needing forgiveness,) and administering to them a holy rite, in which is given bread and wine, an emblem of the sacrifice made by their Prince when He died for them; and which, when rightly received, nourishes and strengthens them continually to do His will. The privilege given them when thus assembled in His temples is very great, for the Prince has promised especially then to be in the midst of them, though they cannot see Him."

"How much He has done for them!"

"He has, indeed, leaving them without excuse. He says in His Book, 'What could I have done more for my vineyard that I have not done in it?' And the tie between Him and His children is so close, that He compares Himself to a vine, of which they are the branches, and tells them that 'Although it may be possible for a mother to forget her children, yet He will never forget them.'"

"What wonderful love!"

"Yes, it is unbounded; it is only possible for me to tell you but the smallest portion of it."

"And what will be the end of these people?"

"The Prince, as I told you, returned to His Father; some of His children are continually

taken to Him, or carried away by the enemy, according to the manner in which they have lived, either as His children or the enemy's: but He has promised that, after a time, there shall be an end to this state of things, and that He will Himself come again, and separate between His children and the enemy's; and then the bodies of those that have died shall rise again from the grave, as His did, and be reunited to the soul, and shall go with Him to everlasting blessedness."

"And when will that be?"

"That no one knows, as He has not told His people, because He wished them to be always ready, and constantly watching for Him."

"Can you tell me anything about the kingdom to which He will take them?"

"He tells them He has gone to prepare mansions for them in His Father's kingdom, and that it is a city of such exceeding beauty, as eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither the heart of man conceived; 'A city that hath no need of the sun nor of the moon to shine in it, for it is enlightened by a light far surpassing these; that there is no night there; its gates are formed of pearls, its walls are garnished with precious stones, its streets are paved with gold; there are streams of water for healing and refreshment; there are no tears, no sickness, no sorrow, no parting: for the King Himself shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

"But surely, Sir, they cannot know all this, for while I watched them they seemed wholly engrossed in the things around them, whether it were pleasure or business."

"It is right they should be diligent in their business, and their good Master wishes them to enjoy also all the good gifts which He has given them, but unfortunately they constantly forget the Giver, even where His gifts are appreciated; but the messengers' work is continually to remind them, both in the temples and out; and I, who am one of them, am now charged with a solemn mission: we have long seen that all the signs the Prince gave of His return are fast fulfilling, and we have told them so; and I am now about to give an urgent message; and if you wish to know more, come with me, and see how it is received."

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST MESSAGE.

LUKE xiv. 16—20.

AND now I thought I followed him to a large mansion, where I heard music and dancing. After a time I saw the messenger go up to a young man, who appeared to be the master of the house, and he said to him, "The King has sent us out, to inform you all that He has made a great sup-

per in honour of the marriage of His Son; and now He bids you to the feast."

But to my astonishment he made light of it, said that they had long heard these visionary tales, but that he certainly could not come, for he had just married a wife. My companion urged that that need be no hindrance, as she was invited also, and that the happiness of both would be greatly enhanced by accepting the gracious invitation of their King, and preparing themselves to enter into His kingdom when He called them. But he gave him no attention, and he was obliged to turn and leave him.

He went from one to another, but did not get the ear of any. They all seemed too much occupied to listen to him.

At length he addressed an aged-looking man, although he evidently tried to look young, and he said to him, "Surely, Sir, these revels must have lost their zest for you, who may so soon be called upon to leave them?" At which he appeared much offended; and said he was younger than many there, and he should certainly continue to enjoy the pleasures of the country as long as he could.

"Yes, Sir, but I bring you news of much higher pleasures, happiness greater than any you have ever known or dreamed of."

"Oh," said he, "every man prefers choosing his own way, and I choose this."

"But hear me, Sir: the King has sent us to invite all to His feast; even now it is prepared; and when once He has risen up and shut to the door, it will be in vain to seek admittance."

"Ah, I see it is the old story; but I have no leisure to hear you."

Then we left them, and went to another place, where we saw a man very much occupied with his farm. We joined him, and my companion gave him his message. I immediately perceived a smile on his face as he answered,—"Why, Sir, you do not suppose I can have leisure in the midst of all my duties to attend to this?"

"It need not hinder your duties; surely your King desires that all His children should be diligent in business; and looking for your Prince continually will only make you happier in the performance of all you do; and you will rejoice in the thought of His appearance at any moment, and long to meet Him; you also will be a better master, a better husband, and a better father: all things will go well with you, if you seek His blessing, both now and hereafter. Oh, listen, Sir; remember there is something beyond more worthy to strive for than the present."

"I am satisfied with the present, and indeed I cannot waste time in talking with you longer, for I have just been making a purchase of several oxen, and I must go to prove them, so 'I pray you have me excused.'"

"Is it possible," said I, "that they make their daily business and unimportant things like these an excuse for refusing such blessings as you have described to me?"

"Yes," he answered, "they are swallowed up in the present, and strive continually to forget the future; and so stifle in their hearts the soft whispers of the Dove."

And now we turned to another place, and entered into beautiful grounds, surrounding a very large mansion: here was everything that could delight the senses, — graceful trees and green grass, gardens filled with sweet-scented shrubs and flowers. We entered the house, where we found the same appearance of luxury; everything was rich and beautiful—all that could be accumulated to please and gratify the tastes of the occupants. We were shewn the master of the house, and I immediately feared what would be the reception of the message with him, for he had an irritable, dissatisfied expression on his face. He looked so hurried and engrossed as he was about to leave the house, that I thought he would hardly stay to hear the message; but when he did, his answer was like all the rest: he said,—"I am sorry I have no time to hear you now, for I have just bought some ground to add to my own, and 'I must needs go and see it.' I pray you excuse me."

Then I heard my companion say, "Thus they

lay field to field and house to house, they pull down their barns and build greater, forgetting that perhaps the next moment they may be called upon to give them all up, and appear in the presence of the King whom they neglect, and to whom is due all their allegiance. But come, let us speak to the lady."

Then we entered a spacious room, where sat a lady. She looked tired and weary. She was splendidly dressed, and reclining on an easy chair, with a book in her hand. The messenger gave her his message, she languidly raised her head from the book she was reading, and said,—"Really, Sir, I cannot understand the meaning of your message; I have of course heard of the Prince you mention, for it is a very old story, but my time is so much occupied with various things, and visiting my friends, and in receiving and entertaining them, that I have no time to think about these unreal things you speak of."

"Oh, Madam," said he, "the occupations you mention are the unreal things, for it is written in the Prince's Book that these shall all pass away, but the things belonging to Him, and to His kingdom, shall endure for ever."

"Well, I never find time to read the Book you speak of; and when I have looked at it I thought it dull and unintelligible."

"There is a light to guide you if you would ask for it; and oh, the joy you would find if

you loved your Prince, and tried to follow Him!"

"Well, we are generally considered good friends to the poor on our place, and we go sometimes to your temples, and I suppose we stand as good a chance as our neighbours of being in the right way at last."

And so we left her. Upon this I felt very sad, and asked him what he could do to make the people hear; but just then we came again into the streets, and overtook a young man who appeared by his dress to belong to the richer class of people.

"Ah, Henry," said my companion, "where are you going to?"

Upon which was turned towards us a face in which I could trace recent sorrow, but no peace,—it was an anxious and restless expression.

"Where am I going to? why, it little matters where I go now, there is nothing left that I care for, and I am trying to drive away thought."

"Are you still fighting against your King because He has taken from you what He only gave you for a time at best."

"Well, she was all I cared for here, at all events, so do not talk to me any more about His love: what is all to me now I have lost her?"

"But will you not strive to follow her to the land of the Prince? or will you exclude yourself from her for ever, both here and there?"

"Oh, I cannot, I will not listen to you: I know she was too good to stay here, but if she could not make me good, who do you suppose can?"

"Perhaps you put her in the place of the Prince, and you know He says, 'He that loveth brother or sister more than Me is not worthy of Me.'"

"I have no patience to attend to you, and am determined to plunge into everything to drown my sorrow."

"And then blame your Prince, because you work your own ruin! Oh, Henry, listen to me; in the name of her you loved so much, listen to me. Your Prince loves you more than any human creature ever did, and has done more for you to shew His love, and is now beseeching you, through me, to turn to Him, and repent of your evil ways, as He is ready to forgive. Besides, He has sent us with a message of invitation; He is about to come again, and expects His children to be ready when He calls them, to enter with Him to the marriage supper: and then you will see her again. Oh, if love to your Prince has no effect upon you, let her love move you to turn from your evil ways, and to follow Him."

"Ah," he said, with a laugh, "the old story; you are always promising me something, but nothing ever comes of it."

And then my companion said, with a very solemn voice, "'Now be ye not scoffers, lest your

bands be made strong,' and at length it shall not be possible for you to hear. Oh, Henry, hear the voice of mercy, while you can; the next voice may be the voice of judgment, and it will then be too late to plead."

But it seemed in vain, and I saw some other young men join him, and I watched them all turn into one of those dreadful places, whence issued loud sounds of rioting and drunkenness, and which my companion informed me were among the traps set by the enemy to entrap the unwary; and so we lost sight of them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECOND MESSAGE.

LUKE xiv. 21, 22.

Now while I was thinking of all that I had seen, I saw another of the messengers coming towards us, and as soon as he came to us I heard him say to my companion, "The King has sent me out to tell you all that you must go now into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, and the sick, and the maimed, and the blind; and go quickly."

Then we hastened our steps, and went into poorer and narrower streets, where we saw many ragged children playing about, and everything looked squalid and wretched. And now we turned

into a very small house, where I saw a wasted woman lying on a comfortless-looking bed, but it all looked neat and clean about her in spite of her own emaciated appearance. She seemed a great sufferer, and few were the outward comforts that surrounded her, yet there was a bright expression on her face which told of inward peace, and I noticed how clearly her lamp shone; and sitting by her side I saw a sweet-looking young girl, who had been reading to her, and I heard her gentle voice just saying softly, as we entered, "There shall be no more pain, neither sorrow, nor crying, for our King shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, dear," said the poor woman, "what comfort you bring me; that is blessed indeed. And you think I need not fear?" Upon which, as she caught sight of us, the young girl ceased speaking, and the messenger, coming to the bed-side, answered for her,—"No, you need not fear, though you may feel you have failed in your love and duty, and been unable to bring Him anything worthy in return. Yet our Prince has never failed us; His love has followed us in all our wanderings, and He longs more to receive His penitent children than they to go to Him."

"Oh, Sir, how can I return His love?"

"That you can never do; it is too high for us even to understand; but He in His mercy accepts our love, (provided we give it all to Him,) for He

has given it first to us. But now I come to bring you good news: our Prince has sent us out to tell all His people that His supper is prepared; His guests are bidden, yea, He invites all to be ready for the marriage supper; see that your lamp is burning when the midnight cry comes, to enter in before the door is shut."

And now I watched my guide take from a bag he carried in his hand a small box, with a silver cup and plate, and the young girl spread a clean white cloth upon the table, on which he placed them, and I saw they contained bread and wine; and after kneeling, and saying many beautiful words, he gave them to the sick woman, after having taken some himself. Just then, I thought a ray of light seemed to gild that room, and I heard a soft whisper, which said, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, I am beside thee; when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee:" and then the smile that lighted up that poor sufferer's face was so bright and calm, and full of peace, that I felt I would rather be in her place, than in the place of any I had seen, surrounded with all the rich and beautiful things which the country afforded.

I wondered much at all I saw, and as we left the house I asked the messenger if there were

none amongst the rich and great who served their Prince, and who were longing to meet Him.

He told me there were many, but it was easier for the poor in all their wretchedness and poverty; they had so little to set their affections upon in this country, where their portion was almost entirely toil and penury, and therefore they were found more frequently to hail with delight the prospect of exchanging their sorrows for the joys promised them; but still in all, the enemy has worked such ruin, that there is a natural repugnance to following their Prince, the way to whom is more difficult, whereas it is so much easier to follow in the way of the enemy.

I asked him who that pleasing young girl was?

He said, "She is one of the ministering children, (for there are many who help us, both old and young,) to bear the King's messages of love and goodness, and go to read His Book to the sick and helpless, who sometimes cannot read it themselves. Her name is Mercy: she belongs to a rich family in the place, who delight in doing good and visiting the poor and afflicted, for this the King has desired His people to do; and even tells them that whatever good they do to His children He will look upon it as a service done to Himself."

Now, as I looked round, I saw Mercy following us, and turning to her asked her where she was going next.

She said she was going to a house a little farther on, to see a sick child.

"And do you like to go about amongst these poor people?" said I.

"I do, indeed," she said, "for I know how our good Prince went about all day comforting the sick and afflicted, and I think it so gracious of Him to allow us to do anything, however small, that can be in any way like what He did."

"But will He receive you to His kingdom as a reward for the good you do for Him?"

"Oh, no; nothing we can do can merit His kingdom; that is His free gift to all that will turn to Him and forsake the enemy. But after He has made us clean in the fountain He has opened for us, and the King has accepted us on account of what He has done for us, He condescends to receive every little act of love we do to His children as if it were done to Himself."

"But do you never feel elated at your share in the work?"

She blushed, and hung her head, as she said quietly, "Our enemy is very strong, and we are very weak, and evil thoughts are often suggested to us; but our Prince is never weary of forgiving, and it only makes one feel more humble when one finds how weak one is."

I could not help thinking, as I looked at my sweet companion, Here is one, at least, that strives to follow the Prince, and although possessing all

the good things of the country, is content to leave them, and to serve Him and do His bidding.

And now we entered a little cottage, where we saw a sick child lying near an open window. She had a very young, almost baby face, though she was older than she looked. The moment she caught sight of Mercy her eyes brightened, and she expressed her pleasure at seeing her. A book lay by her side, and Mercy asked where she had been reading.

"I have been reading about the shepherds," she said, "who were watching their flocks when the angels came to tell them of the birth of the Prince, and where they would find Him. I was thinking what their delight must have been. Will you say me those lines you repeated to me the other day, about the night on which the angels came to the shepherds, and then the music they heard?"

Mercy immediately said the following:—

"It was a calm and holy night,
And down with soft and silvery light,
O'er Judah's hills, and plains afar,
Shone out each planet and each star.
The grazing flocks on mountain side
Slept, while their shepherds watch'd beside:
No sound but of the gurgling rill,
Making the stillness deeper still!
When hark! What music greets their ear—
Is it a whisper—sphere to sphere?
Or have heaven's portals oped to smile
Upon this peaceful scene awhile?

The shepherds tremble with affright,
As bursts upon their darken'd sight,
That gleam of heaven's own radiant light!
And lo! an angel voice o'erhead,
Startles them from their mossy bed.
* * * * *
Then all around, on earth, in sky,
Bursts forth angelic harmony.
And multitudes of heavenly host,
In rapt adoring wonder lost,
Pour'd forth their glad Hosanna's strain,
Filling Judea's silent plain."

"Oh, thank you! I so often lie awake at night, and think about that music,—and oh, how I long to hear it; I suppose I shall soon, for mother says I get weaker and weaker every day; but I am not at all frightened, for you know that you read to me out of His Book that He carries the lambs in His bosom, so I know that nothing can hurt me there."

"Yes, dear, it is so written; and when they brought little children to Him, and those who followed Him would have sent them away, He said, 'Suffer the little children to come to Me, and forbid them not, for of such is My Kingdom.'"

"Oh, how good and kind He was. And He went about to the poor, as well as to the rich?"

"Yes, dear, His chief work seemed to be amongst the poor, for they were more willing to hear Him; and He said, 'He came to seek and to save all that were lost.'"

"Mother frets so, at the thought of losing me;

I wish I could see her happier.—Oh, mother dear," she said, (throwing her arm round a poor woman who was kneeling by her,) "I wish you would not fret so; this dear young lady will come and see you when I am gone, and tell you all about that beautiful place, where I hope we shall all meet again; — will you not?" she said, looking at Mercy.

"Oh yes," said she, greatly moved.

"And you know," continued the child, "that though you cannot see me, perhaps I may be near you; and you can think of me, safe with Him, past the fear of grieving Him any more, for the enemy cannot follow me there; and you know, the good messenger told us, when he was here, they think He will return soon, and I have been lying here looking over those hills, that I might catch the first gleam, and fancying I should see Him first, and the glory shining from Him. Will you also watch for Him, dear mother, and repeat the little prayer I say so often, about His will being done."

I looked at Mercy; I saw she could not speak. That young spirit had all the brightness, indeed, I supposed it must be just about to go to the land of the Prince, and that even now His unseen ministering spirits were around, and waiting to bear it away, 'with soft wings sheltering,' to that blessed home. Mercy set down her little basket of good things, and after she had kissed the child's

cheek, and we were about to leave the house, the poor mother told her, that her little Mary had been talking like that all day, and that she thought she should very soon lose her.

"Oh," said Mercy, "how I wish I could comfort you; but only think, though you may lose sight of her for a short time, what her rest and peace will be; and she will be with her Prince whom she loves so much: besides, the time really appears short; oh, be yourself ready to join her; and then there will be no more parting."

Now, as we came out, we saw a great crowd, and upon looking round I saw the messenger I had before spoken to, and asked him if he knew what was the matter. We pressed into it, and there I saw the figure of a man carried in the arms of some other men; it seemed a young man, and I thought I recognised the dress as belonging to the one we had before seen, and whom the messenger had warned so solemnly. They at length laid him down in a small room near, and when I saw the face I knew it to be the same. After some restoratives had been given to him he opened his eyes, and looking wildly round, cried out fiercely, —"Where am I? I have been with fiends: they took me to their torments! Am I there? Where am I?"

"Henry," said the messenger, taking his hand, "you are still here; repentance is yet possible for you: your Prince still calls to you, and is ready to

pardon, though you have so often rejected His love. Oh, trifle no longer, but accept His proffered grace and mercy."

"You cannot know what you say," he cried, wildly: "I have hated Him, I have trampled on His blood, I have defied Him,—oh, He can no longer offer hope to me."

"Oh, Henry, when He was here, He told a story of a wicked son, just such as you have been, who had despised his Father, who had left his house, and spent all his substance on sin and wickedness; but when at last he was sorrowful and turned back towards his Father's home, the Father saw him a great way off and ran to meet him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and brought him into his house again with gladness: and thus is your Prince now longing over you, in spite of all your sins. Oh, let Him not plead with you in vain."

"It is too late," said the wretched young man, "too late. It was only a few hours ago that I refused to listen to His offers of mercy, and now see, your words are almost fulfilled; His judgment is upon me, I have been seized in the midst of my sins; oh, I cannot meet Him, I cannot meet Him."

I noticed now how all his gay companions shrunk away one by one, and left him in his extremity. For some dreadful attack had seized him while he was drinking, and he had been

told that these must be fatal to him if he persisted in this way of living.

"Oh," he cried again, "that I could now have some of those hours that are gone for ever! How often, when you used to talk to us, I have desired to serve my Prince, and thought how good and gracious He was; but I have never had strength to go on; some one would come and persuade me to go the other way; and now it is too late, too late! the door is shut against me!"

"I tell you, Henry, it is not too late; the door is not shut; and your Prince says, 'Turn ye, turn ye, ye backsliding children, why will ye perish?'"

"Oh, does He say so? Is it possible there can yet be any hope? How can I meet Him—I, who have reviled and scorned His offers of love? Oh, there is no hope, no hope!"

But now the messenger knelt down by him and prayed, and at length he appeared to soften; and then he wept, oh, such bitter tears, and striking his breast said, "Have mercy on me, oh, my Prince! My Prince, forgive, and help me!" and so he wept and groaned. Just then I thought I heard a distant sound of music; it was unlike anything I had ever heard before; and as I listened to catch the delicious strain, I thought it had perhaps floated down from some of those harps of gold in the far-off land of the Prince, which the sick child longed so much to hear, and I called to mind those lines,—

"Yea, heav'n's own Court with rapture rings,
When, as the angels keep
Their watch upon ambrosial wings,
They strike on golden harps the strings—
To see the sinner weep."

We then left him, the messenger promising to come again to him soon.

And now we met a band of men, women, and children, following some show that they were carrying from street to street, with shouts of laughter; indeed, there appeared no thought outwardly amongst them at all. Here and there the messenger gave his message; some smiled and ridiculed, and some listened. "Is it possible," I said, "that these people can know the solemn mission with which you are charged?"

"Yes," he said, "we are continually warning them; but it is just as my Prince told us, that they should be living in carelessness, eating, drinking, and feasting, and He should come suddenly, and but few should be prepared for Him."

And now we turned into a small, neat-looking house, where we found a lady in deep mourning. My companion asked her how she was, and I soon found by their discourse that she had lately lost her husband.

"I can think of nothing," she said, at last, "but the land to which he is gone. Oh! tell me, Sir, is it wrong to long so for my Prince's coming? for when I was expressing it the other day to a friend, I was told that I was deceiving

myself, and that I was really longing to meet my husband again, and thought it was love for my Prince."

"Do not let that thought trouble you," said he: "your Prince is all love and mercy; He pities our weakness, and gently and tenderly draws our affections to Himself; you will gradually find your heart drawn more to Him and less fixed upon even these dearest objects of your love; and there is nothing wrong in comforting ourselves with the hope of seeing those again whom we have lost when He comes."

"Oh! how he loved his Prince; he looked so happy just before he departed, that his face was almost radiant, and I could not help thinking, when next I saw him, whether he could look more bright. But oh! they have been weary months and days since then: I seemed at first so stunned; I felt no affliction could further grieve me, and I cared for nothing; all was one great void to me, that nothing could ever fill; he was my all: I have felt ever since as if I walked in a dream, for my whole thoughts are in the land where he is gone, and I long to be there also."

"You read in His Book, and seek His help, I trust?" said he.

"Oh, yes," said she; "and that word pleases me more than anything, in which He calls Himself the 'husband of the widow.' I can understand that; I know there was nothing that my husband

would not have done for me, or given to me, if it had been in his power to obtain it; and when I think of that, and know with what confidence I should have asked him for anything I wanted, it gives me courage to go and carry all my wants to my Prince, whatever they may be."

"Well, see that your lamp is burning, and that you are found watching; for we are now sent on an urgent message, to invite all to come to the marriage-supper, and our Prince is at hand."

And now we entered into another house, where two poor aged men were sitting together, and we overheard them talking to one another. One of them had a book in his hand, from which he appeared to have been reading. And the other was saying, "No night there!"

"Well, it has been a weary night with me, here, comrade. 'No night there!' those are fine words, indeed."

The messenger adressed the one that was reading, and said, "I hope you are not suffering so much to-day, Ben?"

"Not more than usual, Sir, thank you," he answered; "I have always pain where my leg was taken off."

"Well, my friends, I come to bring you good news: our warfare seems nearly at an end, and I trust you will approve yourselves as good soldiers against the enemy of your Prince, as you have done against those of your country."

"Well, Sir, I have had many a hard fight for my country: I fear I have not fought so manfully for my Prince," said one.

"I come to tell you that the time is at hand when He will reward His servants, and He invites all to come to His marriage-supper."

"Indeed, Sir," said the other old man, (who I perceived was blind,) "that is good news for those who are ready for Him."

"Well, you know where to get the oil, John; and see that your lamp is burning brightly."

"I am not able to read His Book, the worse for me, Sir; but I sit and think about the land of my Prince, and try to fancy, when my poor eyes open upon it, what a sight of dazzling glory will fall upon them; the blind and the lame shall rejoice alike, then, Sir."

"Yes," said Ben, "he comes and cheers me up a bit with his talk, now and then, and I read out of the Book to him, but we are only poor ignorant men. To think that the Prince should invite such as we! Well, it makes all our troubles light, to think about Him and all He has done for us."

"Yes, our sorrows are small, compared to what He endured for our sakes."

"And oh! to think, Sir, that He enters into our sorrows now, and says, 'In all our afflictions He is afflicted;' why it is passing wonderful, I take it."

"It is, indeed."

"I have often felt what a pleasure it was, Sir, for a man to be called forth by his general to be commended; but oh! if I may ever hear my Prince say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!' it will make a lifetime of sorrow and anguish seem as nothing."

Then, turning to the other, the messenger said, "You can walk about, John, and go and tell your neighbours and friends of this gracious invitation, and beg them to be watching."

"That I will, Sir;" and I overheard him softly say, "Oh! my Prince, my Prince, these blind eyes shall be satisfied when they look on Thee, and behold Thy glory!"

Now when we came into the street again, we heard loud voices; and proceeding to the spot we saw a man who appeared very much excited and angry. He was speaking with great irritation to his wife, who looked timid and frightened, and was apparently bearing his violence with much patience.

"Adams," said the messenger, "I fear you are not in a mood to hear the message with which I am charged. The Prince sends to invite all to His supper; you have at different times expressed some love to your Prince: how comes it you exhibit so little of His spirit? That woman, whom you should love and cherish, even with the tender love that the Prince bears to you, how can she

have provoked you so far, as that you should treat her with such violence?"

"I am sure, Sir, I read the Book, and live better than most of my neighbours; but no one can help being irritated sometimes."

"Oh, friend, if you read His Book, you will find what is the fruit of His Spirit; and you know we must tread in His steps, and follow Him: and if indeed you would be ready to enter into His kingdom, you must keep sin under, and not allow it to overcome you;"—but surlily he turned from us.

And thus the messengers went from place to place, bearing their message. Some heard, and heeded not; to some it came as a bright gleam of hope, cheering their dark path; and some refused to listen altogether.

And now I caught sight of my little friend Mercy again; and having a great desire to see her home, I followed her, and entered, for I seemed to have power to go where I liked, and see what I pleased. She had just returned from her mission of love, and I saw her lamp was bright.

She went into a room where a lady was sitting, who appeared in the prime of life; she was surrounded with rich and beautiful things, and her own appearance bespoke her to be in possession of all the good things which the country afforded: but there was a quiet calm look, which

at once charmed me, and I noticed that her lamp also burned brightly.

"Well, my child," she said, as Mercy entered, "and where have you been this morning?"

"I have been to several places, dear Mamma. I have seen little Mary; she is so happy, though she believes she is dying, and must soon leave her mother. But, dear Mamma, the messengers are telling the people our Prince is coming soon, and giving His invitation to them to be ready for His feast: and it makes me feel as if I could hardly bring my mind to my ordinary tasks and studies; they seem so unimportant when one thinks of such things."

"It puts them in their proper place, my child, and makes them subservient to these weighty matters. I know, indeed, it is true the messengers are now bidden to go out with an urgent message, but the common and ordinary duties of life need not interfere with our being prepared to receive our Prince, so long as we are doing nothing contrary to His will: we can continually keep our hearts, watching our thoughts, watching our words, and all our actions; constantly thinking whether we are in a state in which we should welcome Him. I think that nothing but a knowledge of His intense love will give us this, and deliver us from the bondage of looking for merit in ourselves, as a ground of confidence. For instance, my child, if I were away from you,

and you were expecting my return, would you not, whatever you were doing, still be listening and longing for me, provided you were only doing what you knew I should approve of? You would not be alarmed at the idea of my coming, neither would the expectation of it prevent your fulfilling your duties; you would only be constantly listening for the first sound of my approach. But if you were a disobedient child, and doing what you knew I should disapprove, it would be different; you would not then look for me with delight, but fear."

"Yes, dear Mamma; but I feel myself so unworthy, and so far from being what I desire to be."

"Dear child, our Prince knows our infirmities, He knows there is nothing good in us but what we receive from Him; He accepts our love, first placed in our hearts by Himself, 'for we love Him because He first loved us.'"

"Yes, dear Mamma, I know it ought to be so."

"Think, too, my child, of His condescension: He has said in His Book, that He is so near us, and loves us so, that 'He hearkens and hears when we speak about Him,' and that He hath a book of remembrance written before Him, in which are the names of His people; and He says, 'They shall be Mine in that day when I make up My jewels.'"

"Oh, Mamma," said a sweet little one, who

had been all this time sitting on a footstool at her side, "then I think little Mary will be one of His jewels, she is always talking about Him, and longing to go to Him. I heard her tell Mercy so, the other day, when I went with her to see her."

"Yes, my Ada, I have no doubt little Mary is one of His loved ones; and He has many other lambs which He carries in His bosom, and will safely keep in His fold."

"Oh, Mamma, how I should like to be a lamb in His fold,—the cruel enemy could not touch me there, could He?"

"No, dear; He cannot pluck one out of His hand who comes to Him, and loves Him, and strives continually to follow Him."

Now while I was listening to this sweet prattle, a lady and her daughter came in.

"You look grave, Mercy," she said, as she took her seat.

"Yes," said her mother; "we have been speaking of 'the message' which the Prince has sent of His speedy coming; and thinking whether we were prepared to meet Him."

Her face for an instant wore a strange expression of fear, which changed quickly into scorn, as she answered,—"Dear me, sister, I wonder you can allow your children to be troubled about such things at their age. Why this is the time they should enjoy themselves, and not mope

over such gloomy thoughts. I suppose it is some of these mad messengers you refer to; there are always to be found such visionaries, carrying about some new thing."

"I should be very sorry," she replied, "that my dear children did not enjoy themselves as you say, but I do not think they will enjoy less happiness because they are looking for One whom they love; who is, moreover, to take them to such joys as no tongue can describe; it will only be an addition to their happiness."

"Well, I cannot understand these new ways; I am content to go on in the way our fathers went; they are good enough for me; besides, there are some of these messengers continually talking in this way, but I avoid them, and prefer listening to those who keep to the old beaten paths."

"But surely you believe that our Prince will return; and that the time of His coming must be drawing near now, you can hardly doubt from every thing you see; and He has bidden us to be always watching, that He may not come upon us as a thief, and find us unprepared."

"Well, yes, I remember some such passage; but really we have been so often told that He is coming, that we cannot always be thinking about such an old story, particularly as nothing ever comes of it."

"Oh, my dear sister, you forget that you are

speaking the very words that He said His people should be speaking before He came; and He calls them mockers who say, 'Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were." But this is only a proof of His love and forbearance, that more may be saved. But now those that study His Book most, consider that all the signs He gave are fulfilled, and they are taking out His message into the streets and lanes of the city, to bring in all they can find."

She rose abruptly, I thought she felt more than she liked to express; but again saying she was satisfied with the good old way, the sister took her leave.

"Oh, Mamma," said Mercy, "how I wish my aunt would not talk so. Poor Florence is so anxious to hear and know about these things, and her mother does not help her."

"Let us leave it, dear child; we can do no good in speaking about it; it only leads to a spirit of judging, which is a most hateful thing; for, unless we could know the advantages and disadvantages of every creature, we could not be in a position to judge. And even our Prince, when He was here, although He knew the thoughts of the heart, said, 'He came not to condemn the world, but to save it;" therefore, certainly, we, who are ourselves sinners, have no right to judge one another:

where we see any one living or acting in a way we know to be wrong, and can with humility and love shew them their error, let us strive to do so with all gentleness, remembering always that in "many things we offend all;" and then let us pray for them, and leave them in His hands who is the only rightful judge.

CHAPTER V.

THE THIRD MESSAGE.

LUKE xiv. 23, 24.

AND now I found myself again wandering in the streets of the city, and I saw the messengers hurrying here and there; and I heard one say to another, "We have had a fresh message from the Prince, and 'He now desires us to go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that His house may be filled, for He has determined that none of those that were bidden shall taste of His supper.'" And now, as I followed them, I perceived that they went into places still more miserable than any I had before seen; in and out of hovels, where poverty appeared with all its accompaniments of filth and wretchedness. I saw sights of misery which it would be impossible to describe; but great was my surprise to find how eagerly, in many instances, these

wretched creatures listened to the message of the Prince. One here and one there would cry out, as they spoke to them,—"What! hope for us? any one coming to bring us good news?" Many appeared never to have had their lamps lighted at all; many had lost them altogether, and those that remained were, for the most part, almost out. Men, with fierce and haggard countenances; women, with harsh discordant voices, and faces on which no trace of gentleness remained; children, half-clothed, half-fed, untaught, and only using their lips to speak profane or angry words. But still, in and out, amongst them, went the messengers. Sometimes they met with rude or scoffing words, sometimes sullen and dogged silence, sometimes almost violence; but it stayed them not: they besought them to listen, for the time was short; and many listened. I saw men hurrying about in the dress of the higher orders; and ladies too; they were collecting round them all they could gather, and striving to teach them what they were capable of learning, just as they were, even in their dirty and ragged state. And as they continued daily to instruct them, they grew changed, and at length wore an appearance of greater cleanliness and comfort, and looked less hard and savage. The messengers met the people in different places, as they could collect them; sometimes beside the hedges, sometimes in a corner of a street; sometimes they gathered

them in rooms, to give them the message of invitation from the Prince; for they could not prevail upon them to come in their ragged garments to the beautiful temples, where the more respectable people met. It was a strange thing to hear the messengers pleading with these miserable creatures; inviting them from their abodes of wretchedness, to prepare to enter that glorious land, which was of such surpassing loveliness, telling them of the love of their Prince for them, even for them, as well as for the noblest. For He made no difference in His love; He had died for all His children alike; whether they were high or low, rich or poor, all who would turn and accept His mercy. And that over each there should be joy in the land of the Prince. Yea, the messengers told them that the Prince took especial care and trouble over these lost ones; even "as a shepherd leaveth his flock in the wilderness, and goeth after the straying one until he find it. And when he hath found it, he bringeth it back again on his shoulders rejoicing." Some of them appeared so wretched and fallen I could hardly conceive them to belong to the same race of beings I had before watched: so debased did they become when they entirely forsook their good Master, and followed only the Enemy. For his power over all that were led by him was so great, that they became more and more blinded and given up to him, so that at length it appeared

almost impossible to make them understand, or believe anything. Some poor creatures I saw, who felt so deeply while the messengers addressed them, that they would cast themselves down on the ground in agony, trembling with agitation, and exclaiming,—"Undone! undone! undone!"

"Oh, no," said the messenger, "not undone; there is yet time; He saveth to the uttermost all, all who will turn to Him. 'Turn ye, turn ye, ye backsliding children, why will ye die?' He willeth not that ye should perish."

"But I have lived all my life in rebellion against Him," cried one strong man, who shook in every limb. "And did you say He was coming? coming to judge us? and I must stand before Him?"

"Then turn to Him now, whilst you can; the day of mercy is not yet past. Turn to Him and repent."

He again shook with a paroxysm of agony and cried out,—"There can be no hope for me; nothing is left but the lake of fire: I see it, I am hanging over it by a single hair. Oh save me, save me!"

"Look to Him who hung on the Cross to save you, and still bids you forsake your sin and turn to Him. He saveth to the uttermost."

Fearful were the sights and sounds we heard and saw, and I thought how wonderful must be the love of the Prince who sought to bring into His

banqueting-house creatures so sunk and degraded as these appeared to be. But the messenger assured me that His love was exhaustless, that no tongue could tell it; that He was never weary of seeking those who had gone astray; that He longed for the return of His children, and that when they did return to Him, so intimately was He concerned about them, that to make it intelligible to them He had declared that He held them so dear "that He numbered the hairs of their heads;" that He "kept them as the apple of His eye;" that "He would cover them under the shadow of His wings, gathering them as a hen doth her chickens;" that "He would bear them in His arms, and carry them in His bosom," and that "whosoever touched them touched the apple of His eye."

I saw some poor creatures who seemed too miserable to listen. The hardships and trials with which they were surrounded appeared to have deadened all their senses. Here I saw a wretched woman weeping over the body of her dead child, yet quite unable herself to find means to bury it. As the messenger spoke to her, the only comfort she seemed to feel was that the poor babe had left all trouble, and would be spared the misery she endured. There were many others living in this same place, who were going on with their different occupations, while she wept; and I thought it hard that she had no spot, however

small, where she might have the luxury of weeping alone; and I could not help wishing that some of the ladies I had seen, lapped in luxurious profusion and yet at times unsatisfied, should have seen this poor woman, and so have learnt to prize the blessings with which they were surrounded, and which they merited no more than she did.

The messenger strove to comfort her, and begged her to look from the cares and sorrows that surrounded her, and never rest till she found that only consolation for the broken-hearted, the consolation of becoming a follower of her Prince; and besought her to prepare herself by His help to meet Him, when He came to call all that were ready to His supper.

In the next tenement to which we went, I saw a man with a countenance in which poverty and all its accompanying wretchedness had set its stamp. He came staggering in from some house of drunkenness, where he was in the habit of spending everything he could get,—generally the earnings of his wife, which she had saved to buy the morsel her children ate; and when he could get no more of his own to spend he would still drink on with any one who would give it to him. He came into a miserable room, where the messenger was listening to the sad tale of his wife; she seemed to have known better days, but had become soured by ill usage and hard fare. She

had been telling him she worked from morning to night, but could never get enough, so ill were they paid, to supply her children's wants; and whenever her husband could, he took away her earnings, and beat and ill-treated her if she did not give them to him. It was no use to speak to him then, but the messenger begged her to try and persuade him, when he was himself, to come and hear his message. She wept much, and though hard at first and uninclined to listen, she said at last,—"Ah, Sir, I was taught once, and might have done better; but it is hard for us, with all our poverty, sorrow and cares, to go right."

"Well, come to your Prince, He invites you to His supper; and think what it will be to escape all your cares and troubles, and gain that land of peace and blessedness."

"But oh, is it possible that you should be serious, Sir?" said she; "can He really mean you to invite us? It is too beautiful to believe."

Sometimes the messengers would go into the dens of drunkenness where the wretched creatures assembled; and there such scenes occurred that it were impossible to describe. But strong in the might of their Prince, and burning with His love, even there they would proclaim His Name and bear His message, although it was one of the strongholds of the enemy.

Sometimes they would emerge from these places holding some quivering creature whom they had

succeeded in dragging out with them, almost at the cost of both their lives, the uproar being so great that any amongst them should have dared to listen to the message of the Prince, and followed by some of them with violence and tumult even into the street. I trembled for the stedfastness of the wretched being thus plucked from the furnace, who would now be exposed to the scoffs and jeers of his former companions; and feared they might be more than he could endure, and that he might fall back again to those hateful ways, which had become almost habitual to him.

"Ah," said the messenger, on my expressing this thought, "you see how difficult it is for them to forsake the enemy and turn back into the paths of their good Master."

I was now for some time attracted by a figure which appeared very active, going from house to house. And at length I was delighted to recognise the young man whom I had before seen in a state of suffering, both of mind and body, but now apparently quite restored, and persuading and collecting the people to come to the places where the messengers assembled them, teaching the children, and otherwise assisting with great earnestness to spread the message he had once himself despised.

And thus they went, from one place to another, from hovel to hovel, bearing their message. Some accepted it with joy, and walked in the light of

it; some scorned; some just heard, and went their way; some appeared to rejoice in it for a time, till something came between and diverted them.

With the rich and great, often the love of riches and the pleasures of life seemed to engross them too much to allow of their giving themselves time to think of anything but their own amusements or gratification. With men of science or business, this also was their excuse for not finding time to attend to it; or it was too visionary, and needed the proofs without which their intellect would receive nothing; and indeed none of the things concerning the Prince could be received by the natural understanding without enlightenment from the Dove; therefore the pride of the intellectual man formed the strongest barrier of all to the reception of the message. For if he would only accept what he could understand by his intellect, (which in the matters of the Prince was but darkness,) it was impossible for him to receive it; for He has said in His Book, that "the wisdom of the wise is foolishness in His sight:" whereas the simple and childlike mind, offering no opposition to the whispers of the Dove, is more capable of receiving the message of the Prince.

Sometimes with the poor and miserable the cares of life seemed to stop their ears.

But from one cause or another, I thought very

few seemed to be prepared, and I wondered much that in all the wretchedness and uncertainty, at best, of this strange country, the news which the messengers bore and the invitation they gave was not everywhere hailed with gladness; and I could hardly account for it, even though they told me that it was the work of the enemy, who blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, that they might not hear nor see, and thus continually frustrated the work of the messengers.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GATHERING.

AND now I saw in every part an unusual stir and movement; everywhere there seemed more haste and bustle; no one appeared to have a moment to spare, not even to give to family or domestic relations. Time seemed so precious, and all labour so gigantic; everything seemed to go faster, so much was pressing; no one appeared able to keep pace with it, as if they thought the time too short to accomplish what remained to be done; or if they did not think so, they acted as though it were. Kings and emperors fought and exchanged kingdoms, and new boundaries were formed to some which had stood unmoved for ages. Others who for centuries had held the highest place and the largest dominions, appeared

tottering to their fall, or left their thrones, and fled before the people who no longer would endure their rule; while some who a short time since had held the smallest states, were now spreading on all sides, till they grasped half the surrounding kingdoms. Great emperors arose who were nothing yesterday, but who were now parcelling out the destiny of all other nations. There seemed a universal shaking of the people; all established things were moved; a fear, a secret dread of they knew not what; a trembling of all hearts, a looking on and wondering what next would come. It was visible everywhere; you read it on every countenance; it was plainly written in the anxious, restless look.

The most trifling, who sought to drown in folly and pleasure the fear that crept over them, still started when they heard the message, though they professed to make light of it and treat it with contempt.

"What does it all mean?" I asked of one of the messengers.

He only answered by a quotation from the book of the Prince, "'Overturn, overturn, overturn, till He come, whose right it is.' It is one of the strongest signs He has given us of His near approach."

War, or the preparation for war, was everywhere. This also was another of the signs of His coming. Entire nations armed themselves,

each looking on the other, and vying to outdo one another with the magnitude of their preparation.

And now I thought the aspect of everything grew darker.

Some of those whose lamps were burning shone brighter than ever; they appeared to be more intently watching, listening, as it were, for every sound, in a state of instant preparation; they put everything in order, as those about to leave their home, desirous that nothing should hinder their departure; their attitude was that of men girded for a race, only waiting the signal for starting. They warned all around them. Some looked to old lamps long neglected and dim, and the flame began to burn again. Many of the degraded creatures that I had seen dragged from dark holes and corners by the messengers, came now to the different gathering-places, where they daily met to read and pray; no longer looking wretched, dirty, and haggard, but cheered and brightened by the hope which had now filled them, and rejoicing in the news which had been carried to them; self-possessed and exalted to know that even they were invited to find entrance into the far-off land, the glories of which they had never before conceived.

In the place of the miserable hovels I had first witnessed I now saw many clean and comfortable households, though still poor. Instead of the men returning from the midnight orgies of

drunkenness and riot, where they had spent their all, and meeting harsh words, angry frowns, and discomfort, they came to receive kind words and gentle smiles. Their hearts were changed; love, blessed love, had visited their darkness; the love of their Prince had imbued their souls, and His love was such that wherever it was felt it softened their hearts to one another, as it gradually assimilated their minds to His. Whereas on the side of the enemy the mind daily became more and more brutalized.

And now I thought it was dark night. Again I heard sounds of revelling and drunkenness, feasting and folly,—scenes of sin and darkness indescribable. Some slept, some with lamps burning brightly, having trimmed them before they lay down to sleep; some with them just flickering, some with hardly any perceptible light; some quite extinguished, or altogether lost; when suddenly a stream of light, above the brightness of the sun, floated out upon the darkness. It seemed to come from the distant horizon; it widened, it spread out over everything, opening up with its brilliance all the dark places; it appeared a mingling of every colour. I could only suppose it had streamed down from the streets of gold with added glory from the gates of pearl, amethyst, and sapphire; for more than rainbow hues were blended in its brightness.

Every light of earth was extinguished by it: the faces of the revellers turned pale with horror;

the dark and loathsome things which had dared to stalk forth into the night with brazen front and shameless mien, making darkness more dark, slunk away to seek a hiding-place; but all in vain; every lurking place of secret crime stood open and revealed; concealment was past, and they appeared in all their hideousness.

And then a voice, which shook the earth, proclaimed,—"Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him."

The sleepers started from their beds. Some seized their lamps, but found no oil to trim them, —they were almost out. They hurried to and fro, requesting oil from those whose lamps were burning, but they had only sufficient for themselves; "and while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came."

I thought of little Mary; of the sweet lady and her children; of the old soldiers; of many another poor sufferer whom I had seen, and to whom this earth had seemed such a blank, cold, cheerless thing, but who had loved and longed for their Prince, and had now gone to meet Him who had been to them Husband, Father, and Brother.

And now fast the light again was fading, and mountain, hill, and vale were settling down in darkness. Still the crowds pressed on, and still the light faded. Their dim lamps were not sufficient to guide them, as they groped through the thick darkness that had gathered now. Those

that were ready had gone in with Him to the marriage, and the door was shut!

Yes, the door was shut, and they were left without,—the door which for centuries had stood wide open, inviting all to enter. They had scorned the offers of mercy; been deaf to the whispers of the Dove, the pleadings of the Prince; they had turned to any trifling thing, as more important than His message of invitation; they had waited for the convenient season which never came.

All the joys, and riches, and pleasures of the happiest and longest life were but as a grain of sand in the balance when compared with the exceeding weight of glory which had been prepared for them; and in pursuing these they had lost all. They could not blame their Prince. What had He not done, even to the laying down His life, to save them from this doom? But there they knock in vain, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" and the answer to them is, "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not."

And now they feel the pangs of hopeless, unendurable remorse. Was it the sting of the undying worm begun? The Book of the Prince reveals not, and we cannot lift the veil. But there, outside the closed door, from the midst of that impenetrable gloom, arose a long, loud, piercing wail of agony, when at length they found that they had come—TOO LATE!

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